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SAN ANTONIO COUPLE GETS MAXIMUM SENTENCE FOR COMMITTING MAIL FRAUD EXPLOITING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK

(SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS) This morning, United States District Judge Fred Biery sentenced a San Antonio couple to the maximum five years in federal prison for their roles in a scheme which exploited the September 11, 2001, terrorism attack on the World Trade Center buildings in New York City. In addition to the prison term, Judge Biery ordered that 31-year-old **ROBERT LOPEZ** and 29-year-old **MONICA CERDA (a.k.a. MONICA LOPEZ)** be placed on supervised release after completing their prison term.

"The maximum sentence given to the defendants reflects the seriousness of their crime. It should serve notice that such actions will not be tolerated in our community," stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton. "The defendants' greed violated the trust of generous Americans."

"Let this be a lesson to those who would contemplate taking unfair advantage of human tragedy. These individuals got what they deserved," stated Acting Special Agent in Charge Robert D. Grant of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—San Antonio Division.

Both defendants plead guilty to one count of mail fraud—Lopez on March 4, 2002, and Cerda on January 25, 2002. Both admitted to defrauding San Antonio citizens and businesses by collecting donations based on a fabricated story that Cerda's sister died from smoke inhalation as a result of the attack of World Trade Center buildings. One donation included a \$25 check made out to the Veronica Serda (sic) Memorial Fund that was mailed to a San Antonio bank.

A few hours after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, Lopez and Cerda opened a memorial fund account at a San Antonio bank to deposit charitable donations by falsely representing that a family member had died as a result of the attack on the World Trade Center Buildings. After opening the memorial fund account, Lopez called a San Antonio television station and informed them about the family member who had supposedly been killed in the terrorist bombings. Lopez supplied the television station with a picture, which Lopez falsely represented was a picture of the deceased family member and her son. The picture was an old photograph of Cerda, who in fact, was alive and in the state of Texas at the time of the attack on the World Trade Center buildings. The television station aired a story on its newscast that showed the picture, identified the memorial fund set up at a local bank, and invited the public to make donations. The bank has frozen the account and reimbursed donors.

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